

Module A: Richard III & Looking for Richard



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MODULE A: Comparative Study of Texts and Context

This module requires students to **compare texts** in order to **explore them in relation to their contexts**. It develops students' understanding of the effects of **context** and questions of **value**.

From the BOS Prescriptions

'In this elective, students will explore how meanings of a pair of texts can be shaped and reshaped by considering the nature of the connections between them. Exploration of the connections between the texts will enhance understanding of the values and contexts of each text. Relationships between these texts may be implicit or explicit. Connections may be established through direct or indirect references, contexts, values, ideas, and the use of language forms and features' (BOS Prescriptions 2009 – 2012).

Module A: Comparative Study of Texts and Contexts - Examination Rubric

In your answer you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the **meanings of a pair of texts** when considered together
- evaluate the **relationships between texts and contexts**
- organise, develop and express **ideas** using language appropriate to **audience, purpose and form**

The question will focus on **an aspect of the texts** or a **link between them**. You need find the **connections between the texts**.

Ideas	The Texts	Values
Conscience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How far are we prepared to go? Even at the end when Richard has been confronted by the ghosts of those he killed and betrayed he exclaims '<i>O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me?</i>' (Av, siii) He does not seek salvation. Shakespeare explores how individuals can ignore their conscience and commit evil such as the murderers of Clarence who hesitate only for a moment before taking his life or Buckingham who supports Richard until he makes that mistake of having to consider whether he supports the murder of the two young princes – '<i>He did all the dirty work and propped up the king.</i>' (Looking for Richard) ▪ Clarence fears death because he has killed others to increase his power '<i>I have done those things, /That now give evidence against my soul...</i>' (A1, siv). ▪ The women in the play represent the voice of conscience and compassion. The scene omitted by Pacino is key to revealing Richard's evil, cruelty and complete lack of compassion and morality (AIV, siv). The one exception to this is the wooing scene where Anne agrees to marry Richard. Even Richard is amazed: '<i>Hath she forgot already that brave prince,/Edward, her lord, whom I, some three months since,/Stabb'd in my angry mood at Tewksbury?</i>' 	Integrity Compassion Humility
Free will vs. providentialism	Richard III is determined to orchestrate his own destiny. He is ' <i>determined to prove a villain</i> '; however, this is a pun referring to the conflict between his free will and his	Piety Humility

	<p>destiny to be a villain. Even when he faces death in battle, Richard reminds us: <i>Slave, I have set my life upon a cast, And I will stand the hazard of the die...</i> (AVsiv) Queen Margaret reminds him of God's will and providence. The Duchess of York foreshadows the dire consequences of his evil: <i>Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end;/Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend.</i> (AIv,siv)</p> <p>Although the defeat of Richard supports providentialism, Shakespeare's representation of Richard as a seductive and charming villain provokes thought about the place of free will and determinism and represents the renaissance struggle. <i>Looking for Richard</i> reflects a secular world with no reference to determinism.</p>	
Duplicity	<p>Richard III is never what he seems. He is only honest with the audience informing them of his plans and celebrating his success. He uses irony skillfully to hide his ruthlessness and lack of conscience. Even after all of the bloody deeds he is able to convince the people, albeit for a brief time, to support him. As one actor observes in <i>Looking for Richard</i> 'So now all that's left is winning the people!' Pacino sings gleefully 'He's got the whole world in his hands!'</p>	<p>Integrity Honesty Loyalty Truth</p>
Artistry/Communication	<p>The power of Shakespeare's language: the nuances, lyricism, the delicious irony and dramatic techniques. In <i>Looking for Richard</i>, when the actors discuss the ambiguity and complexity of the lines in the play and how they should interpret these lines they convey to the viewer the duality of both the magnetism and refutation of Shakespeare's artistry. Richard frequently employs powerful rhetoric and clever word play to seduce others and the audience. Imagery and striking metaphors flourish in Richard III and are used to symbolically represent Richard's villainy. Vanessa Redgrave speaks lyrically of the power and emotion of Shakespeare's use of language – 'the beauty, depth, passion, music of his words.' The African American speaks eloquently about how words today have lost their meaning and feeling, 'If we felt what we said, and say less we'd mean more.'</p>	<p>Beauty</p>
Complicity	<p>'What, do you tremble? Are you all afraid? /Alas, I blame you not, for you are mortal...' (Gloucester) A1, s.ii)</p> <p>Richard III's acquisition of power can be attributed to his manipulative skills and the moral weakness of the other characters. As Machiavelli states in <i>The Prince</i> 'It is double pleasure to deceive the deceiver.' Lady Anne is fully aware of what Richard has done yet she is seduced by his flattery and agrees to marry him. Richard judges her weakness accurately. When the murderers come to kill Clarence, Brackenbury's inaction is attributed to the desire to protect his reputation, 'I will not reason what is meant hereby, / Because I will be guiltless of the meaning' (A1, siv). Even the anonymous murderers argue about morality before killing Clarence. The Archbishop is persuaded by Richard to hand the young princes over to him removing the protection of the church.</p>	<p>Integrity Courage Honesty</p>

Ambition and Power	The pursuit of power is paramount in <i>King Richard III</i> . Richard is not the only character who betrays, manipulates, kills and lies his way to obtain power and control. The actors in <i>Looking for Richard</i> are fascinated by the battle for power and the hatred that is palpable, <i>'They are clawing at each other for the throne!'</i> They compare the play to the film <i>The Godfather</i> – <i>'The gathering of the Dons in this room.'</i>	Moderation Integrity Humility
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Social, Cultural and Historical Context

<i>Richard III</i>	<i>Looking for Richard</i>
<p>Political context: Stable, however, Queen Elizabeth has no heir; Catholic unrest – ongoing political intrigue. Audience familiar with Machiavelli's <i>The Prince</i>: <i>'Politics have no relation to morals.'</i> Shakespeare illustrates the terrible consequences of suppressing your humanity for power. His villains die alone without respect or love - <i>'There is no creature loves me, / And if I die no soul shall pity me.'</i> (Av, siii)</p>	<p>Political: Loss of trust and faith in politicians in a postmodern world. Redgrave states <i>'The truth is that those in power have total contempt for everything they promise, everything they pledge, and this is really what Shakespeare's great play is really about.'</i></p>
<p>Cultural context - Theatre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Queen Elizabeth issued a decree controlling the performance of plays; all scripts were subject to censorship. Thus, the play reaffirms the right of the Tudors to rule. Influence of the Morality Play and birth of the modern tragedy evident in this Historical Tragedy. Shakespeare adopts a providential view of history as an organising framework and draws on the Vice character of the Christian Morality play to create a play that is beginning to reflect the modern fascination with the central character. However, Richard moves beyond the Vice figure and a Machiavel as he is very human and even heroic in places. The Vice who represented the seductive power of the Devil seduced Everyman to succumb to temptations. Although the character of Richard III has its origins in the Vice - <i>'Thus like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word'</i> - he is more subtle and human. An academic in <i>Looking for Richard</i> states <i>'Already in this play he is thinking about human beings as actors and about the stage.'</i> Meta-theatrical historiography: Richards' meta-theatrical role as conducting a "direful pageant" playing a range of roles from loving brother, desperate lover, benevolent statesman and protector of the crown. 	<p>Cultural context - Hollywood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All productions unquestionably accept Shakespeare's representation of Richard as a villain. Pacino has continued this reading of Richard's character. Pacino recognises that Shakespeare's Richard is a product of humanism and represents a time of change - <i>'This guy Richard...make up your mind...what is he? First you say he's a kind of devil, then you say he's a kind of mad court jester. Then, he's a dead ringer for a kind of medieval Vice. Whatever that is? And then he's described as some sort of scourge of god or Machiavelli, and somehow at the end we're meant to feel some pity for him...weird?'</i> <i>'It has always been a dream of mine to communicate how I feel about Shakespeare to others.'</i> Technology and a modern American audience who are resistant to Shakespeare. A stream-of-consciousness 'drama' documentary that is a deliberate pastiche of cuts from interviews with actors and scholars juxtaposed with impromptu vox pops with people on the streets of New York City to bring Shakespeare to the general public. Meta-documentary: Pacino's role as director and actor merge. He controls artistically the representation of Richard and the content. Pacino's pageant is 'insubstantial' as his film is never made - <i>'We're never going to finish making this movie.'</i>

<p>Social Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Religion: Secularism and free will vs. providentialism: Shakespeare's times reflect a shift from humanity's unquestioned relationship with God to a more secular exploration and fascination of what it is to be an individual with free will. As Hamlet wisely observes '<i>What piece of work is a man?</i>' Richard is a blend of the providential Vice character and the secular Machiavel. He represents symbolically the tension between medieval religious pre-determinism and Renaissance humanism ▪ Women: Subjugated and marginalised, however, Shakespeare represents women as the voice of morality and reason. Anne, the Duchess and Elizabeth – the Three Marys of the Resurrection - as the forces of predestination, fate and divine retribution against Richard's sacrilegious actions. 	<p>Social Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Religion: Secular society, therefore, Pacino is not so fascinated with the tension between God's will and man's will. He focuses on Richard's ambitions and how far he is prepared to go to achieve absolute power. ▪ Women: Liberated but marginalised in places by Pacino, such as in the wooing of Anne where Kimball establishes Pacino's authority, interrupting Ryder to mock her interpretation. Side lighting, camera angles turning away, and editing reinforces Anne/Ryder as subservient to Richard/Pacino.
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Things to consider when preparing...

- ALL texts reflect the values and context of the time of production.
- What aspects of composers' respective CONTEXTS influence the way each text represents certain characters, themes and values?
- HOW does Shakespeare SHAPE certain characters, ideas and values through his play, and how and why does Pacino RESHAPE these aspects? (What language forms and features of this text type are relevant to your discussion?)
- In RESHAPING Shakespeare's play which scenes does Pacino focus on and why? Think about the characters, ideas and values they represent (and relevance for his context). How does he reshape these scenes through his chosen medium of the docudrama? (What language forms and features are relevant to this text type?)
- Examining the same scenes will enable you to show the connections between the texts.
- Remember, each composer is influenced (either implicitly or explicitly) by their respective contexts which affects WHY and HOW they explore characters, themes and values.

Comparative Essay Structure

Thesis

Ensure you plan your thesis carefully. It provides you with a roadmap for the rest of your essay. The introduction must contain the following four components (not necessarily in this order):

1. Articulate through a THESIS or LINE OF ARGUMENT that responds to the question an understanding of how context shapes and reshapes a text.
2. Express the notion that by exploring connections between texts we gain a greater understanding of language, character, themes or values? – the question creates this.
3. Present two to three KEY IDEAS why/how this is so to support your thesis.

Question: Discuss how the changing contexts and values of your prescribed texts has shaped the characterisation of a main character OR one key idea.

Examples of an introduction

1. *Shakespeare and Pacino ground the evil of Richard differently in their respective texts. The reasons for this divergence are mostly contextual. Shakespeare's Richard is not merely an ambitious villain, but the personification of a metaphysical evil – a Machiavellian prince whose vice-like character is derived from the medieval morality play. These attributes manifest themselves in Richard's deformity – part of a religious paradigm whose didactic purpose would not have been lost on an Elizabethan audience. However, broad contextual shifts have resulted in Pacino downplaying the significance of Richard's deformity in his adaption. Instead, the director attempts to recreate a villain for our times, emphasising mainly the political characteristics of a tyrant-king rendered recognisable to a modern audience.*
2. *The nature of truth has always been a significant aspect of human nature and through the comparative study, it demonstrated the notion of how humans conceal the truth in order to deceive and manipulate each other. Truth was not valued by the evil character of Richard, but rather it was manipulated as a tool for deception. This malleable nature of truth is shown in both William Shakespeare's *King Richard III* (1592) and Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* (1997). Shakespeare explored how truth was undervalued by a villain like Richard in the Elizabethan era whereas Pacino focused on how Richard manipulates others by twisting the truth. However, both of them are linked to the representations of power and Machiavellianism as the pursuit of power often disregards the truth.*
3. *An exploration of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and Al Pacino's docudrama *Looking for Richard* reveals that the construction and purpose of Pacino's docudrama establishes a bridge between the two texts and creates a new level of understanding for the modern audience. It is through the idea of the power of language that Pacino bridges the gap between the texts. Both Shakespeare and Pacino share a common purpose in reaching out, educating and challenging the audience of the time and thus they both explore the power of language to evoke feelings, persuade, manipulate and deceive both the characters within the play and also the audience.*

Markers will look for...

- How the question is dealt with through the thesis.
- The key ideas and development of the thesis in response to the question.
- Judicious choice of textual examples.
- How context and values are used to inform the response.
- The integrated analysis of the two texts in a comparative study.
- The quality of analysis and evidence to support the thesis.
- The quality of the writing.

Possible Theses

- *Looking for Richard* connects the audience to Shakespeare through the exploration of the enigmatic Richard III.
- Both *Richard III* and *Looking for Richard* are products of different times yet they are connected through their exploration of what it is to be human.
- *Looking for Richard* reconnects us with Shakespeare's characters and themes reminding us that they are timeless. We can look for Richard, and find him, in the world around us.
- Pacino's *Looking for Richard* demonstrates how the reshaping of an original text, such as *The Tragedy of King Richards III*, is influenced by the purpose, values and context of the composer.

Essay Questions

1. *'This guy Richard...make up your mind...what is he? First you say he's a kind of devil, then you say he's a kind of mad court jester. Then, he's a dead ringer for a kind of medieval Vice.'*

Whatever that is? And then he's described as some sort of scourge of god or Machiavelli, and somehow at the end we're meant to feel some pity for him...weird?'

"In *Looking for Richard*, Pacino focuses on how human action shapes history and identity, whereas Shakespeare who is composing one of the first modern historical tragedies represents the conflict between providence and determinism."

Explore this notion through the representation in the documentary and in the play of the character of Richard.

2. *"In order to bring Shakespeare into the public arena, Pacino takes his camera and microphone into the streets of New York City and asks random passers, 'What do you think of Shakespeare?'"*

From your comparative study of the documentary and the play what do you now think of Shakespeare? In your response, you must refer to what you consider to be **ONE** of the most significant ideas that Shakespeare conveys and Pacino explores.

3. Pacino tells us in *Looking for Richard* that we should be looking for Shakespeare's Richard III in the world around us, and in ourselves.

From your comparative study of the two texts evaluate how Shakespeare and Pacino represent human frailty.

4. *"The play's the thing."*

Pacino privileges the narrative of *The Tragedy of Richard III* by tying the sequential progression of the documentary to Shakespeare's plot instead of the actor's process. Select **TWO** of the scenes that Pacino presents in the documentary and consider why he chose to focus on these scenes.

5. *"When I first let the students know I was going to read Shakespeare, they were reluctant to listen to it. But we would talk informally about the play and then I would read an excerpt. Soon, they found the equinox from their world to the world of Shakespeare."*

How does the comparative study of *Looking for Richard* and *The Tragedy of Richard III* provide a connection between your world and the world of Shakespeare? Identify **TWO** significant connections.

6. *"The film is not about me doing Shakespeare's Richard III. It's about me as an American actor looking for Richard and meditating on what I find."*

What do you find by looking through the lens of the documentary at Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Richard III*?

7. Shakespeare introduces in the opening scene the mirror as a reflexive metaphor to explore how what we see in the mirror can be an illusion: 'But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks / Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass'. Pacino represents Richard how others see him, but he is drawn to the dark villain who uses words and actions to hide the 'shadow' in the mirror. How has the comparative study of *Looking for Richard* and *Richard III* enabled you to arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature of deception?
8. *"In England you have had centuries when words are totally divorced from truth."*

Pacino and the actors in *Looking for Richard* are fascinated by how Shakespeare has crafted a villain who masterfully manipulates language. A clear understanding of how language can be used to deceive, seduce and control emerges through an evaluation of the connections between *Looking for Richard* and *Looking for Richard*. Consider through a comparative study of the two texts how Pacino responds to the way that Shakespeare endows Richard with the ability to use language to achieve his ambitions.